The public theology of David J. Bosch:
The public role of the Christian community

A mini-dissertation
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When reading the work of David Bosch, the way in which Bosch opened himself up to be influenced by the church really made an impression on me. In his theology, his indebtedness to ecumenical meetings and his emphasis on the local community plays an important role. This was a constant reminder that theology should never, and can never, be formed in isolation. "…unlike philosophical schools or scientific experiments, theology has no life unless it is borne by a community" (Bosch 1995:60).

In my own theological development, and also the development of this dissertation, I need to thank many people. What was written hear, was formed in community.

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Chapter 1

1. Introduction

1.1   Why this study?

My hope is that two fields of study will come together in the following pages. On the one hand I wish to focus on the theology of David Bosch. It has been said that "any missiology can only be done as a footnote to the work of David Bosch" (Bevans & Schroeder 2005:69), making it analogous to the words of Albert the Great which were spoken at the funeral of Thomas Aquinas, that theology after Aquinas will be only a footnote to his work After the death of Bosch, König (1993) described him as probably the greatest theologian ever to come out of South Africa, particularly where scientific theology is concerned. It was from my father and professor Piet Meiring that I learnt appreciation for the work of David Bosch, which caused me to turn to this first field after which I was introduced to my second field of interest: Public Theology.

With the start of the Centre for Public Theology at the University of Pretoria we need to take the time to consider our understanding of this field, to develop our approach to public theology, and find the contribution we can make. It was my search for a "theology which seeks the welfare of the city before protecting the interests of the Church" (Forrester 2004:6) that sparked my interest in this field. William Storrar (who followed Duncan Forrester as director of the Center for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Edinburgh, currently directs the Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton and acts as convener for the Global Network for Public Theology) says that: "for many of us, our commitment to holding together both the ecclesial and emancipatory dimensions of public theology has found its most helpful articulation in the work of the late South African missiologist and anti-apartheid theologian David Bosch. In his seminal book, *Transforming Mission*, he offers an integrative ecumenical and postmodern paradigm of mission that seeks to hold together all aspects of the triune God's mission to the world in creative tension" (Storrar 2007:11). In a recent lecture delivered at the University of Pretoria, Storrar (see 2008) used this work of Bosch extensively. Nelus Niemandt,

lecturer in missiology at the University of Pretoria, writes about "… a remark … by the late prof. Luke Vischer about David Bosch, saying that the next important step in missional theology is to bring Bosch's theology in dialogue with the larger public discourse on global issues such as climate change and concern for creation" (Niemandt 2008).

Many have written about the relevance of the missiologist Lesslie Newbigin for public theology, or used his work within the field of public theology (see Forrester 2002; Drew 2005; Hunsberger 2006), but apart from the above mentioned work by Storrar, and some remarks by Niemandt, nothing similar has been found regarding David Bosch. Indeed, Niemandt notes that he and Storrar are "…baptizing and naming Bosch's emerging ecumenical paradigm as a public paradigm of mission for a global era!" (Niemandt 2008). Yet the work thus far of both is but a very brief engagement with the theology of Bosch, and only uses the well known *Transforming Mission* for this purpose. It is hoped that this study can begin to bridge this gap within the research, especially significant within the South African context.

1.2   The influence of David J Bosch

David Jocobus Bosch was born near Kuruman, and from the age of four grew up on a farm near Schweizer-Reineke in the Western Transvaal (presently known as the Nort-West Province) of South Africa. After matriculation he entered the Teacher's Training College in 1947, but changed over to the University of Pretoria the following year in order to become a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. He received the B.A. in Afrikaans-Dutch and German (1951) from the University of Pretoria, and then the B.D. (1953), and the M.A. in Afrikaans-Dutch (1954) from the same university. Bosch was very positive about the victory of the NP in 1948, but turned against the Apartheid system during his studies. In 1954 Bosch started his postgraduate studies at the University of Basel. He minored in Systematic Theology under Karl Barth and in Missiology under

Johannes Dürr, and majored in New Testament under Oscar Cullmann (Ahonen 2003:45).

Bosch was invited to join the faculty at Princeton seminary a few years before the publication of *Transforming Mission*, an offer which he considered, but then declined saying: "No, I don't think I can leave my colleagues and the struggle in South Africa. It is a critical moment and that is where God has placed me" (Anderson 2004:xiii).

Throughout his career Bosch was a prolific writer. Lesslie Newbigin considered Bosch's last book to be published before his death, *Transforming Mission*, as a *Summa Missiologica* and, as mentioned above, some would even say that, after the twentieth century, all missiology can only be done as a footnote to Bosch (Bevans & Schroeder 2005:69). Or, as someone else put it: "in the world of mission studies, he is surely one of the most significant figures of the twentieth century" (Bonk 2005:58).

1.3   Research Methodology

This is a literature study. A broad overview of recent literature in the field of public theology is used, both from those who consider themselves public theologians, and others who write about public theology from within other disciplines. Out of this study of literature from the field of public theology, some questions will be formulated which will be brought into conversation with the work of David Bosch. The questions posed will determine the selection of his publications which will be used. Other publications about the work of Bosch will also be used, as well as publications of other relevant authors.

1.4   Recent development of public theology

The term public theology was coined by Martin Marty in reference to the work of Reinhold Niebuhr (Bezuidenhout 2007:7). Niebuhr has had an important influence on public theology (Forrester 2004:9-10). What we know as public theology today has developed from the liberation and political theologies of the 1960s onwards (Forrester 2004:14). The influence of Moltmann and Metz in their reinterpretation of political theology, and the liberation theology of Guitierez and others has made an important

contribution in this time (De Gruchy 2004:48, 51). The South African church struggle against Apartheid and the way in which the World Council of Churches (WCC) played an active role in forming policy decisions in those days also had a formative influence on the development ecumenical of public theology. It was only over the last two decades that the term, public theology, has become popular (Smit 2008:par1). Still, there is a wide and contrasting range of understandings of this term (Bezuidenhout 2007:5). Together with providing a broad picture of the playing field of public theology, some questions which could help in interpreting and understanding public theology is explored in chapter 1.

1.5   A creative tension in reading Bosch within public theology

Writing in the first publication of The International Journal of Public Theology, William Storrar (2007:11) points to the work of Bosch, especially *Transforming Mission*, as the place where many has found their most helpful articulation. This is because of the way in which Bosch holds the ecclesial and emancipatory dimensions together in his theology, and more especially in the way in which he seeks to hold all aspects of mission in creative tension. From this it would seem that the question of this study is not whether Bosch was a public theologian, but rather understanding the contribution that Bosch could make towards public theology, and understanding the approach which Bosch would use in public theology.

When talking about Bosch's ecclesiology, or his understanding of the relation between church and world, we need to focus on his use of the *alternative community* concept. The reader who has read only *Transforming Mission* might miss the importance of this concept, since Bosch never used this term in *Transforming Mission*, but a study of the work of Bosch would reveal this from earlier writings. However, in the same article in which Storrar credits Bosch with the most helpful articulation for public theology, he contrasts public theology and the approach of Hauerwas and Willimon in *Resident Aliens* (1989). For him these two are very different theological responses to the end of Christendom. Storrar (2007:8-9) describes their approach as an ecclesial one, which seeks to "offer an alternative model of human society rather than seeking to manage its problems".

How can it be that Storrar at the same time describes the theology of Bosch as of such high importance for public theology, and also describes that of Hauerwas and Willimon as an entirely different enterprise than that of public theology, all this while for Bosch as well as Hauerwas and Willimon the *alternative community* is of such central importance? This apparent tension in the article of Storrar is not the focus of our discussion in this study, but provides an entry point in discussing Bosch and public theology which we will use in chapter 2.

1.6   The public theology of Bosch

The question in this study is not primarily whether Bosch should be considered a public theologian or not. Although comparisons between Bosch and others who call themselves public theologians cannot be sidestepped, these comparisons are, as far as possible, considered not with the goal of testing whether Bosch can be considered a public theologian. Rather, working from the view of Storrar that Bosch's articulation is of vital importance for younger public theologians, these comparisons are done in order to assist us in our task of describing Bosch as public theologian. In the end this is the primary focus of the study, and the question which we will address in chapter 4 is: *How do we* describe *the public theology of David Bosch?*

Chapter 2

2. Defining the playing field of public theology

2.1 Introduction

Although public theology has become popular worldwide in the last two decades, it is not always clear what is meant by the term (Smit 2008; Van Aarde 2008). When one starts to read on the topic of public theology a wide range of overlapping opinions and contrasting viewpoints are found (Bezuidenhout 2007:5). In order to speak about public theology in the work of David Bosch, we will need to find some clarity about what is understood with the concept public theology, or at least what possible understandings of public theology there could be.

A number of recent publications point out that our understanding of the concept *public* as well as our understanding of *theology* will to a large extent determine our approach as public theologians (Smit 2008; Bezuidenhout 2007:21). Although this might seem like simply playing with words, and that the meaning is obvious, what underlies this is the fact that our understanding of the notion of "public" is not obvious, and that different understandings thereof will lead to different understandings of public theology (Smit 2008). Furthermore, our theology, which determines our ecclesiology, will to a large extent determine our public theology (Smit 2008).

2.2 Why the need for public theology

Since the use of the term public theology has been popular for only the past two decades, one must ask whether theology has not had a public voice before the emergence of this field. And if theology did take part in a public conversation, why did a field like public theology become necessary? In his important work, *The Analogical Imagination*, which has had a mayor influence on the field of public theology, David Tracy (1981:3) argues

that all theological discourse is public discourse, and that the theologian needs to identify the public that is being addressed, which would then influence the theological language that is used.

In a similar way, Jűrgen Moltmann (in Marshall 2005:11) said that "From the perspective of its origins and its goal, Christian theology is public theology, for it is the theology of the kingdom of God". "As such it must engage with the political, cultural, educational, economic and ecological spheres of life, not just with the private and ecclesial spheres" (Marshall 2005:11). Both Moltmann and Tracy by implication challenge the idea that there is a part of theology that is public, while another part is not. Why then the sudden need for public theology that is explicitly identified as such, which would by implication say that there are parts that are not public? (Marshall 2005:11) At least two important reasons for this can be identified.

2.2.1   The end of Christendom

> Although there is no consensus among historians as to whether the rise of Constantianism was a positive development or not, they do agree that the church was decisively changed by the decisions taken by Emperor Constantine after A.D. 313 that ultimately led to Christianity being recognized as the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380 under Emperor Theodosius I. Christianity was transformed from a movement located on the margins of society into the official religion of the Roman Empire, from being perceived as a threat to the security of the empire into a guardian of the status quo. Such a profound change in the identity of the church could not fail to have far-reaching implications. Indeed Europe would be known as Christendom until the twentieth century.
>
> (Shenk 2005:74)

In Hauerwas and Willimon's *Resident Aliens* (1989), as well as the first article published in the *International Journal of Public Theology* (2007), we find similar pictures of Christendom in the mid twentieth century: It was a time when children grew up to be

Christian simply by growing up. That which was taught at home, school, church, community and even the media, all contributed to Christian formation (Hauwerwas & Willimon 1989:16; Storrar 2007:6-7). This was a time when biblical faith and society lived in a symbiotic relationship, when society was eager to receive the moral fruit of the church (Hunsberger 2006:16).

Since the time of the Enlightenment, attempts were made to moderate or restrict the public role of religion. Public policy was to be formed using reason, positive law and individual human rights. Theology was welcome at the public table, as long as its voice conformed to the truths of reason, and could be validated by social consensus (Marshall 2005:13). As long as the consensus remained nominally Christian, theology continued its potent public role, but with the growth of secularisation and the final fall of Christendom, this positive reception was lost. Although the right of Christian theology is protected by the democratic principle, and therefore Christian theology has the right to take part in public conversation, its voice is tolerated, not welcomed (Marshall 2005:13). On a tacit level a Christian consensus remained part of society until the 1960's, but churches continued to operate within this supposed Christendom-consensus well after this time (Drew 2005:21). Even today attempts at a continuation of Christendom are found (Drew 2005:23).

Hauerwas & Willimon (1990:15-16) speaks of the night in Greenville, South Carolina, when a Fox theatre opened their doors on a Sunday evening and the church suddenly had to compete with the theatre for the worldview of the youth. Although the end of Christendom didn't happen overnight, the picture they sketch does ring true for anyone who has experienced this shift, like the sudden shift in the South African society when professional sport was allowed on a Sunday. Looking back, we can point to certain events which should have warned us that this symbiotic relationship was over, but for a long time church and society was still perceived to be one, but since our eyes were trained to see them as such, church and society were for a long time, still perceived to be one. Whether church and society could ever have been one, or was one, is open for debate, but by the time that it became clear that is was impossible to see them as one any longer, they were totally apart and the whole image was scrambled (Hunsberger 2005:315-316).

Today, however, the post-Christendom era contrary to what was predicted, is not characterized by the victory of secularism, and philosophical materialism, over religion. Rather a pluralism of spiritualities is now available, but none of these are allowed public control (Drew 2005:23). The secularisation thesis predicted the demise of religions, but as some studies appeared to be proving this thesis, others point to the fact that religion did not disappear, They did not even remain completely privatised (Maddox 2007:84).

> "…just as the adoption of the church into the cultural center in the fourth-century radically changed the nature of its existence, the recognition of its end has created a radical sense of loss and marginalization to which the churches are responding in a variety of ways. The fourth and twentieth centuries form bookends marking transition points in the history of the church. Just as the fourth century adoption of Christianity by Constantine forced the church to struggle with it's self-understanding as the new center [*sic*] of the culture, twentieth-century Christians must now struggle to understand the meaning of their social location in a decentered [*sic*] world.

> (Roxburgh 1997:7-8)

The end of Christendom cost Christian theology and the church its privileged position in the public conversation. It had to take part within the public conversation using the rules of modernity, and was tolerated as long as it supported the consensus. However, the church mostly remained tied to this irrelevant self-understanding, found in the former authoritative role it played within Christendom (Drew 2005:21). If Christian theology, after the demise of Christendom and the shift in consensus still claims to have public relevance, a new approach towards the public conversation needed to be found.

2.2.2 Religious faith constricted to the private realm

Together with the demise of Christendom, a second factor contributes to the need for a specifically *public* theology. Pre-enlightenment and pre-twentieth century times knew a worldview where religious faith had a definite impact on all aspects of life. Now Enlightenment brought the idealisation of reason and positivism. This made faith

redundant within the public realm, since all moral truth was supposedly accessible via reason. By the twentieth century, religion, at least within the European context, was confined to the private realm of an over sharpened public/private distinction (Morton 2004:26).

This view was not only propagated by those outside the church, but also from within. Christian pietism has long provided the soil for fideism, and from within theology many theologians followed Rudolf Bultmann by accepting the positivist constraints, agreeing that the Christian faith is not a matter of public truths, but of privatised, individual truths (Drew 2005:21). As discussed above, the consensus within society remained Christian. However with Christian faith privatized, and within a society that was no longer distinctively Christian, the end of Christendom left Christian theology without a way of showing its public relevance.

Maybe Marshall (2005:11) is correct when stating that the label public theology is an unhappy one, since it suggests that one part of theology is public, while another is not. As I have pointed out above, theology is by its very nature public (see also Drew 2005 21-23), however, similar to the way the demise of Christendom caused Christian theology to lose it's public voice, the relegation of religious faith to the private realm did the same. This development further contributed to the need for the rise of this unfortunate label. For theology to be public, the notion that religion affects only private life must be rejected (Morton 2004:25).

2.3   The playing field of public theology

Following this short overview of what it means when we speak about public theology, we need to define the playing field where public theology operates. In this I do not attempt to provide a definition for public theology, but rather to take the first step in defining some of the possible boundaries within which public theology will be found. This does not imply that all who use the term public theology fall within these boundaries. As others have noted, the term *public theology* does not mean the same thing for everyone (Bezuidenhout 2007:8), and even within the *Global Network of Public Theology*,

different centres are defining their roles in a variety of ways (Smit 2008). However, some boundaries seem to be crystallizing out of the conversation, and noting these can help us in our later task of evaluating David Bosch through the lens of public theology.

2.3.1   The *public* in public theology

To this day David Tracy's 1981 work, *The Analogical Imagination* (1981), remains an often-cited book within public theology. Tracy's approach was to argue that all theology is public discourse, but that different publics are addressed by the theologian (1981:3). "The specific audience requires the theologian to tailor a theology that acknowledges the various social realities with their distinct traditions, values, and assumptions" (Bezuidenhout 2007:8). This, however, is simply the acknowledgement of a specific audience for theology at a specific instance (Smit 2008). But if all theology is public theology, and any sphere within which theology speaks could be called public, then the need for a public theology, which is defined as such, and is differentiated from that, which then would not be public theology, again becomes vague.

However, other interpretations of the word *public* in public theology also exist. When analyzing the different understandings of public in public theology, Smit notes that Tracy's approach is to be found on one end of the spectrum of descriptive understandings, in the above mentioned wide understanding of *public* (Smit 2008). On the other end of this spectrum, the interpretation of someone like Bernard Lategan is found, which limit the *public* of public theology to Tracy's third public, that of society, the public life in the world (Smit 2008).

Smit also investigates a more normative understanding of public. In this understanding public is a specific sphere of life separate from politics and the economy, a place where opinions can be formed. This can range from either civil religion, practiced independently from churches and religious organizations on the one hand, to the formation of advocacy groups that would help enhance democracy on the other (Smit 2008).

All of the above mentioned interpretations use the descriptive *public*. This leads to a wide array of interpretations of public theology. Looking at recent publications will make it

clear that this is still an ongoing discussion. At this point we could say that the descriptive *public* points to the fact that at this point in history not all theology is necessarily public, in spite of the inherent public character of theology. Flowing from the understanding that faith does not only have individual personal relevance, but that the gospel has something to say about society, public then points to those theologies which take the welfare of the city, rather than the welfare of the church as their agenda (Forrester 2004:6). This specifically, and in some cases primarily (see Storrar 2008), involves the participation in spheres of public discourse, those places where public opinion is formed, as well as the way in which Christians theologize within these spheres. In the way in which centres of public theology see their own tast, it is clear that it also includes contributing to the formation of a sound economic and political sphere, among others.

2.3.2   Two ends in the spectrum of language in the public sphere?

So, if public theology is necessary in this day and age, and if what is meant by this is that a certain public, which is broader than the church, needs to become the sphere within which Christians theologize, then before we proceed to look at what the task of this public theology would be, we need to ask ourselves how public theology speaks within the sphere? What language does it use (Marshall 2005)?

Marshall (2005:14-16) points to the two ends of the spectrum when it comes to the language the church has used within the public sphere:

On the one hand we find the *common currency* approach, the main strategy the church has used in its public discourse. According to this understanding, shared public truth, derived from rational reflection or human experience, is appealed to, with no explicit use of religious or revelatory language. This approach is seen in Roman Catholic natural law theory, where human reason alone is enough to know moral truth, and it can also be seen in Nazi Germany, where a free-floating natural theology ended up sanctifying the Nazi ideology. A more typical protestant approach is to derive moral guidance from the Bible and the theological tradition, and then to translate this into secular language. The most unique elements of the Christian moral tradition, for example loving of enemies, is

almost impossible to translate into secular language, and thus this approach tends to lose what is distinctive within the Christian tradition.

The second approach used by the church, which is found at the other end of the spectrum, is the *distinctive discourse approach*. This approach seeks to provide a distinctively Christian ethical practice, a Christian narrative that seeks to out-narrate the story of liberal secularism. It seeks to provide an alternative, namely public not in the sense that it seeks commonalities within the public realm, but that it is publicly visible as an alternative social reality. This approach becomes problematic when the Kingdom of God is no longer regarded as wider than the church; the church then tries to gain a monopoly on the kingdom. It also tends to ignore the places where consensus can be found outside the Christian tradition. More advantages and criticisms of both approaches are provided by Marshall (2005:14-16). Noting these two extremes within the spectrum help us in gaining perspective when we look at how public theology generally tends to seek language to use within the public sphere.

Morton (2004:27) writes that for Forrester public theology is advocacy, and in this sense it is evangelism. Forrester (in Storrar & Morton 2004:1) makes it clear that public theology is not seeking to articulate consensus, but to make a unique contribution to the issues of public concern from the tradition of which it is steward, and yet aims to be publicly accessible truth. It listens to the Bible while also attempting to discern the signs of the times. Storrar (2007:25) notes that one of the things that those identifying with the Global Network for Public Theology all recognize is that, in their participation in the global public sphere and in their critique of economic, social, political and environmental issues, they need to be dialogical and pastoral, as well as analytical and prophetic. Again we find the tension between having enough in common to be in dialogue, while still having a voice that is distinctive enough to be prophetic.

Maybe we can further clarify this by stating that public theology is not civil religion. While civil religion is largely optimistic about society, and describes how society relates itself to ultimate reality, public theology is largely critical, pointing out what is wrong within society. It emphasizes that action based on religious belief supersedes other

considerations (Bezuidenhout 2007:9), yet still it does not present the gospel to society in the hope of repentance and conversion (Forrester 2004:6). It rather search for an integrated approach in public theology, an approach that derives its insights, not from some objective ahistorical rational reflection on nature, but from revelatory sources, and is open for truth from outside the Christian tradition. It is an approach that attempts to speak of God in the public sphere neither too early, nor too late, that uses both the language of faith and the language of mediation in the public sphere, and knows when to use which (Marshall 2005:16-17).

Looking at the motivation behind something like public theology is important and needs looking into. We could say that public theology seeks to avoid stepping into the secularization trap of late Christendom, which asked of theology to speak in the same manner that all public conversation is held, and simply use the language of rational reflection, having a voice of faith only when it agrees with the generally held consensus. Still, public theology acknowledges the end of Christendom, and therefore the need to, at times, translate its voice into publicly accessible language. If it wants to have a public voice at all it has to recognize where consensus can be found. Also, public theology moves away from an approach that limits the language of theology only to the private sphere, and argues that the language of faith does have public truth.

2.3.3 Public theology and its relation to academic theology

To use the descriptive *theology* when talking about the task of "…mak[ing] a plausible and principled Christian contribution to matters of public life and debate" (Marshall 2005:12) might also be problematic according to Marshall (2005:11-12). He points out the criticism of Moltmann's idea that all Christian thinking is Christian theology. Theology, according to him, needs to be limited to the task of studying the sources and grammar of Christian confession, and what we then furthermore would need is not public theology but *Christian thinking* about economics, politics or ecology. Although seemingly not sharing this narrow understanding of theology with Marshall, Van Aarde (2008) argues for a similar understanding of public theology - one which says that public theology is not that which is done by academic theologians and pastors at universities or

seminaries, but the theology that people are doing in the public square. According to him academics should then only engage with the theology that people are doing in the public square.

Public theology has, however, within the short time of its existence, understood that theology, as a discipline, also has a role within the public sphere. Tracy's three publics within which theological discourse happens said this, and the way in which centres for public theology function also point to the understanding that a specifically public theology can be practiced by academic theologians and pastors. Morton (2004:30) writes: "But what are the public in which public theology is practiced? Professional theologians are most aware of two of them, the Church and the academy; for it is to these two that most of them belong, these two which in some sense they serve, these two which have given them their qualification or appointment." Within the understanding of public set out above, we must say that theology that has only the publics of Church or academy in mind, which determines its agenda from these two, would not be considered public theology. And how easy it becomes to be trapped by Church or academy, since, as Morton said, it is these two which theologians in some sense serve. To talk of *theology* for the public, professional theology would thus need to explicitly move beyond theologizing for the sake of church and academy.

This being said, I immediately want to qualify myself by adding that today it is accepted that the sphere of the church and academy should not be missing from public theology. More will be said on the church in later chapters, but what is said about theology here, can similarly be said about the church. The academy, the classroom, has its role within public theology. It forms a place of learning, a place in which "…we are in conversation with viewpoints that challenge and bring into question our unexamined prejudices about faith, politics and life" (Storrar 2007:12). As such the academy form a key site for doing public theology, but not the public for which public theology is done. It is not just another audience for theology. For public theology, church and academy form key sites for doing public theology, but they do so as 'truth-seeking communities' (Storrar 2007:12). Within the above understanding of public, the relation between public theology and the academy (and the same can be said for the church) would not be doing theology "on behalf of"

(see the language of Tracy (1981:29)) church or academy, but church and classroom form part of the collaborators doing public theology (Storrar 2007:12). Public theology arise both out of "theological reflection as well as the life and worship of the church, and such theology could be as much the activity of members of Parliament, NGO workers and congregations, as it might be of academics" (De Gruchy 2007:28-29).

Contrary to Marshall and Van Aarde, public theology, as it is more generally understood, does have room for the professional theologians and pastors: they are collaborators in talking to a specifically defined *public*.

2.4   The task of public theology: participating in public discourse

Having pointed out that although theology understands itself to have public relevance, that all theological discourse will not necessarily be undertaken within the public sphere, and that much of Christian life could currently be reduced to that, which has no impact on the public life, we now have to attempt to say what the task of public theology is.

I have purposefully steered clear of giving a definition of public theology, of saying what public theology is. Indeed, the term has become quite ambiguous, with the definition differing from person to person (Bezuidenhout 2007:6-8). In the choice for a specific understanding of *public*, however, certain boundaries are immediately set up within which public theology is understood to function. Furthermore, as we have noted before, our specific understanding of theology, and, so we will see, especially our understanding of ecclesiology (Smit 2008) to a large extent determines our understanding of public theology. Moving within the playing field that has been demarcated up to this point, let me go one step further by making some notes on the task of public theology.

"There is general agreement amongst … theologians [concerned with the ethical quality of life] that the Christian faith has public implications and should form part of public discourse" (Bezuidenhout 2007:8). This involves the formations of a public opinion, as well as participation in the formation of healthy political and economical systems and contributing to whichever other public spheres are identified. Public theology does not

simply let the world set its agenda, as was popular in the 1960's, but takes the welfare of the city as its agenda, rather than the welfare of the church (Forrester 2004:6). Often this does involve making parts of the world's agenda its own, but it also attempts to critically read the signs of the times, and set its own agenda accordingly, which might sometimes differ from that of the world. Sometimes this involves challenging the agenda of the world and its priorities. Public theology "seeks to deploy *theology* in public debate, rather than a vague and optimistic idealism which tends to disintegrate in the face of radical evil" (Forrester 2004:6). The task of public theology may never become to confirm the status quo, but it must always seek its ongoing transformation (De Gruchy 2004:59).

We can say that the task of public theology would be to make a distinctly Christian contribution to the building of a just society. Public theology takes part in public discourse in a way that is distinctly Christian, but uses language that is accessible within this discourse. It seeks to help in the building of a decent society by offering distinctive and constructive insights from its treasury of faith.

2.5   Towards understanding Bosch's public theology

This study does not have as its primary concern whether David Bosch should be considered a public theologian. Not that there is a common answer to this question. South African theologian John de Gruchy is noticeably silent about Bosch when talking about public theology in South Africa. And he is quite specific that the 'third-way theology' from the Apartheid era is not considered public theologies (De Gruchy 2004:50). As we will see in the next chapter, this is exactly where we would find the theology of Bosch. In other circles, however, Bosch would be considered as providing the best articulation for public theology, especially in his vision of an ecumenical missionary paradigm set out in *Transforming Mission* (Storrar 2007:11).

Within the current impossibility of finding a common understanding of what public theology is, it should however be understandable if different theologians give different answers on the question whether or not a certain approach should be considered public theology, or a theologian a public theologian. In the following chapters, we are searching

for the public role of theology in the writings of Bosch, thus working from the assumption that Bosch is a public theologian, and describing his public theology, rather than focusing primarily on an evaluation of his writings in the light of some specific understanding of public theology.

Dirkie Smit ended his contribution at a conference on public theology held at the University of Pretoria in August 2008 with these words:

> *Wat "publieke teologie" is, word nie slegs bepaal deur die betekenis van die woord "publiek" nie, want daar is geen enkele, vaste gebruik van die woord nie. Dit word eerder vandag in hierdie volle spektrum van betekenisse gebruik, vanaf baie spesifiek modern tot baie algemeen en vaag. Wat mense daarom op die oog het as hulle politieke teologie beoefen word grootliks mede-bepaal deur hulle ekklesiologiese en daarom weer deur teologiese redes en keuses – hetsy onbewus of bewus. Dis op grond van wat mense dink dat die kerk is en behoort te wees, wat weer berus op hoe hulle dink oor God en Gods bedoelinge met kerk en wêreld, dat hulle menings vorm oor wat die publieke rol van teologie eintlik behoort te wees*[1].

<div align="right">(Smit 2008)</div>

From this some questions could be formulated which can help in attempting to understand the public theology of a specific theologian, in this study David Bosch. The first questions would be: "What does some one think the church is, or is supposed to be?", and underlying this the question "How does someone think about God and Gods intention with church and world?". In the next chapter we will turn our attention to the question: "*What did Bosch think the church is, or is supposed to be?*" It is thus a question

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[1] What "public theology" is, isn't determined only through the word "public", since there is no single, set meaning of the word. Today it is rather used in this whole range of meanings, from the very specifically modern, to the very general and vague. What people have in mind when practicing political theology is therefore largely co-determined by their ecclesiology, and therefore theology reasons and choices – whether consciously or unconsciously. It is because of what people think the church is and is supposed to be, which rests on how they think about God and Gods intentions with church and world, that they form opinions on what the public role of theology should actually be.

of ecclesiology. Smit's underlying question would be answered in the theology of Bosch primarily through his eschatology, which we would also consider during the course of the next two chapters.

Bosch's ecclesiology has been summarized with the term "alternative community", which he himself has used extensively (Livingston 1990:11). However, in the same paper in which Bosch gets credited for providing the most helpful articulation for public theology, Storrar (2007:11) critiques the work of Hauerwas for urging the church to become exactly this: an alternative community. In answering the question derived from the work of Smit, we thus also focus on this possible tension between Hauerwas and Bosch, or misunderstanding of Bosch by Storrar. By doing this we may get a clearer view of how Bosch's ecclesiology could fit in the contemporary conversation of public theology.

Chapter 3

3. Ecclesiology

3.1   Introduction

In searching for the public theology of Bosch, we would need to answer the questions posed at the end of chapter 2: "*What did Bosch think the church is, or is supposed to be?*" This is intertwined, at least within the theology of Bosch, with the relation between church and world. In Livingston's analysis of the theology of Bosch, the *alternative community* is the most important concept in the ecclesiology of Bosch (Livingston 1990:5). The *alternative community* is not a popular concept within public theology, as is illustrated in Storrar's (2007:8-9) reaction to the work of Hauerwas and Willimon (see 1989).

3.2   The *alternative community* in the writings of Bosch

The *alternative community* is a very important concept in the writings of Bosch, at least for the period dating from the late 1970's till the early 1980's, when he explicitly used these words, and possibly also later (Livingston 1990:11). Bosch stressed the importance of this concept for his theology with title he chose for an article that the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* asked him to write. The journal came into existence in 1972, and in 1982 it approached a number of theologians in Southern Africa asking how their minds had changed in the past ten years. The subtitle of Bosch's article was "Mission and the Alternative Community" (Bosch 1982:6). After first explaining his understanding of mission, he says: "Perhaps it would be correct to say that, in the course of time, the essence of my thinking in this area has crystallised in the concept of the church as the 'alternative community'" (Bosch 1982:8).

3.2.1   The alternative community around Jesus

On various occasions Bosch uses a specific argument in which he points out how Jesus provided an alternative to all other options available within the Judaism of his time. This

argument is then frequently linked to his own understanding of the alternative community (see Bosch 1975:4-7; 1979:56; 1982d:3-15; Nicol 1993).

In Bosch's picture of the historical Jesus he time and again sets Him against the backdrop of other Jewish groups. The four groups Bosch uses are the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Zealots and the Essenes, and he also uses these as analogies for possible choices confronting the church today on how to approach mission.

The first option available to Jesus was that of the Sadducees. They worked with a theology of the status quo, working within the politico-sociological framework, accepting the Roman rule. It was a form of political realism; they knew that the Roman rule could not be overthrown. This evolved to the point where it even appeared that they were defending Roman rule (Bosch 1975:4; 1982d:5-6). We choose this option when we feather our own nests in the name of religion, and adopt a version of religion of which the purpose is to satisfy our own need (Bosch 1984:31).

The second option would have been that of the Pharisees, who despised the Sadducees because of their involvement with politics. Bosch regularly describes them as the Pietists of their day. They busied themselves with that which was purely religious, the classification of the whole of life into what was clean and what was unclean. This option would advocate a purely religious ministry that concentrated on evangelism alone, and steered clear of politics (Bosch 1975:5; 1982d:6-7; 1984:31).

The third would have been that of the Zealots[2], an underground political movement, directly opposed to the Sadducees. They answered the Roman force with force; they were the freedom fighters of the day. They represented a theology of revolution, and identified the reign of God with institutional reform. Jesus was closer to this group than to the other three, but still rejected it (Bosch 1975:4-5; 1982:7). Bosch (1984:31) called this option of diverting the course of history by overthrowing the status quo with the hope of ushering in Utopia, "vain hope".

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[2] Bosch is aware of the fact that they might not have existed as an organized group at the time of Jesus, but considers this unimportant within this particular argument (1975:4).

The fourth option would have been that of the Essenes who withdrew from public life to live in a faithful community, waiting for the final judgment of God (Bosch 1975:5). Theirs is a theology of the ghetto, a theology of asceticism (Bosch 1982d:8). Bosch (1984:31) identified this with the survival preparation evident in some groups today which retreat out of this world and wait for God to destroy the world and our enemies.

But the Jesus which Bosch portrays provided an alternative to all of the above. More than this, the alternative that Jesus provided was seen as a threat by all of the above groups. So for once they chose to ignore their own differences, mere squabbles compared to the depth in which all of them differed from Jesus, in order to get rid of him. And in this, three of the four groups joined hands in the crucifixion of Jesus. The Essenes were not part of this. In any case they would not have dirtied their hands by attacking Jesus; According to their view God would deal with this man from Galilee in his own way (Bosch 1975:5; 1982d:8-9; 1984:32).

3.2.2 The early church

Bosch sees a continuation between the way of Jesus, and that of the early church: "the early church retained the consciousness that a radically new age was inaugurated by Jesus" (Bosch 1982d:17). Although this is used much less than the argument about the new community surrounding Jesus, Bosch also uses the early church as an example of being an alternative community. This was a source of wonder for both those inside as well as outside the church. In this alternative community, contrary to the Roman Empire, Jews and Greeks, slaves and freemen, males and females are all on equal level. It is time and again with a sense of wonder that those on the outside of the church become interested in this new community (Bosch 1979:223; 1982d:30).

3.2.3 The alternative community in creative tensions

Throughout Bosch's work, his approach of holding on to a creative tension between theological concepts which seem to be mutually exclusive, is apparent. This led to the title of a *Festschrift* for his sixtieth birthday entitled *Mission in Creative Tension: A dialogue with David Bosch*. An essential feature of Bosch's missiology, indeed his

theology, is the way in which he holds seemingly incompatible theological emphases in creative tension (Kritzinger & Saayman 1990:1).

The church finds itself constantly being both *in* and *not of* this world (Bosch 1975:4). For Bosch there is a need for these two realities to be kept in a delicate tension, but all too often one of these dimensions is forgotten. It is in keeping this creative tension that Bosch made use if the concept of the Church as alternative community (Livingston 1990:11).

On the one hand Bosch consistently warns against the Church becoming a Christian ghetto (Bosch 1975:5; 1979:224; 1982d:8; 1984:31), and on the other he points to the danger of the church becoming either redundant by doing exactly that which any other social organization could have done or by losing its critical voice through becoming inseparably related to, and sometimes indistinguishable from, the institutions of this world (Bosch 1979:224; Livingston 1990:12). The concept of the *alternative community,* as understood by Bosch, provides a way to keep this tension intact. He stresses that the *alternative community* exists not for the sake of the church, but for that of the world. The significance of the church for the world lies in its being uniquely separate from the world, although for Bosch this did not imply not involved with the world. We work on the renewal of the church and in doing so, also on the renewal of society (Bosch 1982b:8-9; Livingston 1990:5). Christians may never withdraw themselves from the world, from the tasks of the world or from public life, but must take part in it (although by serving, not reigning) (Bosch 1979:224). Political and social factors may never become taboo to the church. At the same time church and world must always be distinguishable from each other (Bosch 1979:224).

For Bosch the *alternative community* must be understood together with the way in which he understands eschatology (Bosch 1982b:8). Livingston (1990:4) has identified eschatology as one of the three key categories through which the work of Bosch must be understood, the other two being ecclesiology, which we have been discussing up to now, and soteriology. For Bosch, eschatology must be understood as a tension between the

"already" and the "not yet" (Bosch 1982b:9[3]). This is an unbearable tension (1982b:9; 2004:510), but one that needs to be held onto. He distinguishes between putting all our stakes on the coming kingdom because we despair of the world, and trying to build utopia here and now, with our own hands, because we have given up hope of a coming kingdom (Bosch 1982b:9). The *alternative community* embodies this tension between the already and the not yet.

> "She is no longer what she used to be and not yet what she is destined to be. She is too early for heaven and too late for this world. She lives on the borderline between the already and the not yet. She is a fragment of the world to come. She is God's colony in man's world, God's experimental garden on earth. She is a *sign* of the world to come and at the same time guarantee of its coming".

(Bosch 1982d:18)

3.2.4   Understanding Bosch's alternative community

Bosch made no secret of the fact that his thoughts on the alternative community were strongly influenced by Anabaptist theologians, especially North American theologian John Howard Yoder (Nicol 1990:89; Ahonen 2003:64). However, we cannot understand Bosch by looking only at Anabaptist influences. Other theologians have also greatly influenced his thinking, especially Karl Barth (Nicol 1990:89). He is critical of Anabaptist approaches that recognize the need for worldly governments, but won't take part in them (Bosch 1979:226), and describes his approach by ascribing to what is similar in Anabaptist and Reformed ecclesiology. He is critical of both, saying that Reformed ecclesiology drew a too direct line between church and world, while Anabaptist ecclesiology tended to ignore the line between church and world. In his own approach, Bosch believed that the more identifiably separate and unique the community was, the greater was its significance for the world (Bosch 1982b:8).

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[3] This stance remains integral to the theology of Bosch in *Transforming Mission* (2004(1991):507-510). For the sake of the argument I limit myself to the time in which Bosch explicitly used the alternative community concept.

Within the South African scene Bosch withdrew himself from both ends of the political spectrum. Although he was highly critical of the apartheid regime, many from the liberation struggle found Bosch not to be radical enough. This was because his preferred option was that the church should form an alternative community, and in this way work against apartheid South Africa (Nicol 1993).

According to Nicol (1993), the main theme coming from Bosch's actions was that Christians were reconciled, and that the unity which existed, transcended all the possible differences. In communicating this, Bosch points to the diverse crowd that Jesus gathered around himself as disciples (Bosch 1979:1-5). This kind of unity and peace Bosch managed to embody within himself. As a leader, he succeeded to a large extent in unifying many moving in different streams of life and theology. This could be seen in the way in which he organized the first SACLA gathering that represented Christians of every spectrum of the Christian community in South Africa. Of this, some would say, that not even the executive committee would have been able to hold together if not for the leadership of Bosch (Saayman & Kritzinger 1996:1).

Bosch's use of the *alternative community* in developing his own ecclesiology and views on the relationship between church and state happened within the context of addressing primarily our specifically South African societal and ecclesiastical problems i.e. apartheid in church and society. His thoughts seem to have developed largely in response to the question of unity and reconciliation amongst the different Church denominations but also amongst people-groups and amongst those who had different political viewpoints Bosch consistently sets his understanding of the *alternative community* up against politically forced separation between the races as well as to separation caused by culture, prejudice and misunderstanding. .

- He uses reconciliation between Black and White as his South African example of building up the alternative community in an article in 1975 (Bosch 1975:10-11).

- His whole chapter in *Die Eenheid van die Kerk* (Meiring & Lederle 1979) was devoted to showing how the new community surrounding Jesus, as well as the

early church, provided an example of how to bridge the gap between the extremes of society (Bosch 1979:1-5).

- In the Open Letter to the Dutch Reformed Church of which Bosch was one of the authors, published in 1982, the word *proeftuin* (experimental garden) was used to refer to the alternative community. From the letter (Bosch, König & Nicol 1982:15) as well as from Bosch's own response to Theron (1982:123-133) concerning this concept (Bosch 1982c:135-137; 141-142), it is clear that what he had in mind, was racial unity and reconciliation.

- A 1982 paper entitled The Church as Alternative Community also stresses the love of enemies and non-believers, and also compassion for others, together with reconciliation. Here Bosch also emphasizes racial reconciliation. (Bosch 1982d:29-34).

- Reflecting on his own theological development between 1972 and 1982, he expresses the conviction that we have to work on the renewal of society by working on the transformation of the church. He then explicitly states that his own focus is on the Afrikaans Reformed Churches, and the unduly high value they ascribe to racial and cultural differences. In conclusion he says that his own theological concern as it developed during the years he referred to is expressed in the Open Letter to the Dutch Reformed Church, "…particularly in the Open Letter's emphasis on the unity of the Church and its prophetic calling. Both of this flow from the central thrust of the Gospel, which is unconditional acceptance and reconciliation" (Bosch 1982b:9-10).

For Bosch, who was deeply committed to South Africa, the end of the road was not the unity of the church, but his hope was that the *alternative community* will become an example and model for society, so that church would show society that peace and mutual acceptance and respect was possible. This would contribute to the end of Apartheid in South Africa (Nicol 1993). The alternative community thus functions as a very practical strategy within the thinking of Bosch (Livingston 1990:12). With the above analysis I do not imply that unity and reconciliation were the only problems Bosch believed could be

addressed by the *alternative community*. Doing that would deny the decisive influence this concept had on his ecclesiology., I merely attempt to point out that this seems to form the context looming behind his use of this concept.

It was especially between 1975 and 1982 that Bosch wrote explicitly on the alternative community. Judging from the reaction in Afrikaans Reformed Churches he says that his attempt to highlight similarities between the Anabaptists and Reformed ecclesiology, by using this nuanced view of the *alternative community*, was not very successful.(Bosch 1982b:8). In 1990 Livingston (1990:11) notes that Bosch stopped using the concept, *alternative community* explicitly, but that the substance of the concept remains vital to his thinking.

- In a 1984 article titled *The Scope of Mission*, Bosch (1984:31-32) again uses the argument explaining the different options available to Jesus. Jesus chooses none of these, but provides an alternative to all of them. Where previously this argument resulted in a call to become an *alternative community*, here Bosch refrains from using the concept.

- In 1988 Bosch contributes to a work on reconciliation. I won't concern myself with his argument here. Suffice it to say that, at least at one point (Bosch 1988:104), the possibility exists for him to continue using the concept, *alternative community*. This is when he points to the alternatives Jesus provided over and against his contemporaries, and the way in which he invited people of every possible sphere of life to follow him. Furthermore, the article is concerned with the very question that Bosch, in previous years, addressed by using the concept *alternative community*. However, also here, the concept is strangely missing.

One instance exists where Bosch again used the *alternative community* concept. Written in 1992, but published in 1993, after his death, is the article, *God's Reign and the Rulers of this World,* subtitled *Missiological Reflections on Church-State Relationships*. In this article Bosch evaluates possible understandings of church-state relationships. The article gives us some perspective on his understanding of the *alternative community* concept at the end of his life.

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3.2.5 Bosch: the alternative community in perspective

Bosch identifies five ways in which the church dealt with civil authorities. For these traditions he uses the following terms: *Constantinian*, *pietist*, *reformist*, *liberationist* and *anabaptist* (Bosch 1993:89). Because both the *Constantinian* and *pietist* models assume that what happens in government is of little concern to the church, Bosch (1993:93) finds them unacceptable. These models, however, do this in opposite ways. The *Constantinian* way is the one in which a close alliance between state and a specific religious organization exists (Bosch 1993:89), whereas the *pietist* way is that of complete separation between church and state. (Bosch 1993:90).

Using the words of Glasser, Bosch (1993:94) calls the other three ways mentioned *world-formative*. The *reformist* calls for "structural changes that would lead to greater justice, freedom and prosperity for all" (Bosch 1993:90). The liberationist exercises a preferential option for the poor, and mobilizes the marginalized for the struggle against injustice (Bosch 1993:91). Finally the *anabaptist* tradition once more brings the concept of the *alternative community* to the work of Bosch. The latter tradition closely relates to what we found in the earlier writings of Bosch, namely, that the church is – and should be - a critical factor in society, an antibody, simply existing in society and in this way pointing to the relativity of all political programs and solutions (Bosch 1993:92).

Writing at the end of his career, Bosch says that these three traditions are actually closer to each other than may appear at first glance. And in this final analysis Bosch spends some time defending especially the *anabaptist* tradition This tradition would find meaning where the church is not able to publicly witness or protest injustice audibly. In these circumstances the *anabaptist* tradition would provide a way for the church to not abandon its world-formative thrust (Bosch 1993:95).

With this in mind we now need to turn our attention to Bosch's *magnum opus*, and ask ourselves how, what was previously described as the *alternative community*, functions in *Transforming Mission*. During the last year of his life, he authored a number of articles, speeches and seminars as well as an essay, posthumously published in a little volume titled *Believing in the Future*, which will also be discussed.

3.2.6 A *distinctive* and *countercultural* community

The student of *Transforming Mission* and of David Bosch is faced with the challenge of the encyclopaedic nature of this work. Bosch had the ability to bring together a vast number of views and understandings, and to put it in a nutshell for his readers. This ability of his makes it difficult at times to discern his own voice; still, if we seek to understand Bosch, we will have to distinguish between his voice, that which he portrays as the emerging paradigm of mission, and all the other voices speaking from the text of *Transforming Mission*, as he describes the history of different theologies.

Let me start out by simply stating that, similar to other writings after 1982, the term *alternative community* cannot be found in *Transforming Mission*. In writing *Transforming Mission*, Bosch draws from all the major denominational streams of the church. A large portion of the book is descriptive in nature, and in this description we find but a passing reference to Yoder (Bosch 2004:405) and the Anabaptists find themselves as a short part of the larger history (Bosch 2004:245-248) of Protestantism. Whereas these were important influences in his works of the 1970's and early 1980's, they have now become a small part of the vast history of the Church that Bosch describes in *Transforming Mission*. Bosch starts out his analysis of the emerging missionary paradigm with a section on the church-with-others, the missionary church. Saayman (1996:49) considers this to be the correct starting point. For at least three decades the main missiological problem was ecclesiological in nature, "…that mission was seen as a consequence of faith, an appendix to the church. The church could therefore be church without mission – a misperception which Bosch conclusively destroys" (Saayman 1996:49). But Bosch not only says that we cannot have a missionless church. He also states clearly that we cannot have a churchless mission. Although both of these have been realities in history, Bosch considers them to be impossible in theory (Bosch 2004:372; Nussbaum 2005:118).

The second last, and the longest, chapter of *Transforming Mission* is titled: Elements of an Emerging Ecumenical Missionary Paradigm. Thirteen elements is discussed in this chapter. Already in the title of this first of his elements, a development in his thoughts is

visible. For Bosch the church should be church *with* others. He traces the development of this thought and points out how the Bonhoeffer formula, 'church *for* others', may possibly have come from the liberal-humanist bourgeois climate in which Bonhoeffer grew up (Bosch 2004:375). What Bosch does not mention, and neither does the analysis of Ahonen (2003:119), is that Bosch himself embraced the Bonhoeffer phrase, 'church *for* others' years before (see Bosch 1979:225). This phrase formed part of his language about the *alternative community*. The rejection of this language seems to imply a lessening of the earlier tension between church and world, an approach that calls for a more humble understanding of the position of the church within the world.

Still, what we find here is not a total rejection of Bosch's earlier thoughts. He still argues that we should talk about the church as a sign, that we recognize its nature as being-different-from-the-world, as remaining unique for the sake of the world, and even that it should be God's experimental garden in this world. (Bosch 2004: 375-376, 386).

In the last chapter of Transforming Mission the place of the substance of the thoughts on the *alternative community* is clearly illustrated. Up to this point *Transforming Mission* is largely encyclopaedic in its form. The last few pages however, seem to give us something of Bosch's vision for the future of mission. His untimely death prevented him from expanding on these tentative guidelines. Piet Meiring, a friend and fellow South African missiological colleague of Bosch, often described this chapter as *vintage Bosch*.

Portraying the multidimensional character of mission by appealing to the major salvific events of the New Testament as metaphors or images, the long development of Bosch's thoughts, which started with the *alternative community*, now finds its humble place amongst the other faces of mission - faces which include liberation theology, as well as participation in civil society (Bosch 2004:512-518). In this, Bosch's original *alternative community* concept, now finds a new meaning in what he calls a *distinct* community (Bosch 2004:517).

That Bosch never rejected the Anabaptist understanding of the *alternative community*, but rather held it in creative tension with being *in* the world, is again clear in *Believing in the Future*. Speaking at a conference in Paris in January 1992, Bosch started to envision what

a missiology of Western culture would look like. He concludes this essay with a number of "ingredients" of a missiology of Western culture (Bosch 1995:55-61). Referring to the work of Hauerwas and Willimon Bosch says that a mission to the West will have to be *countercultural*. "I believe that we have to communicate an alternative culture to our contemporaries. *Part* of our mission will be to challenge the hedonism around us, inculcating *something* of the spirit of being 'resident aliens' in the world" (Bosch 1995:57, emphasis mine). Again, this is not made into the be-all-and-end-all of mission, but throughout his career Bosch was clear that the church should be distinct from the world and culture in which it finds itself.

3.2.7   Development in Bosch's ecclesiology

How do we explain the change in terminology on the *alternative community* after 1982? Is this linked to a development in Bosch's ecclesiology? Some possible answers to the first question present themselves from the writings of Bosch, although they can only be presented as hypotheses.

In 1982 he states that his use of the *alternative community* had been misunderstood, and later explicitly states that he is not talking about an *alternative society* (Bosch 1982:8). This probably refers to those who in 1979, after he spoke of the *alternative community* at SACLA, interpreted this as an *alternative society*, bought a piece of land, and attempted to start an *alternative society*.

In 1992 he again makes a direct connection between the Anabaptists and the *alternative community*, different from his own use earlier which had in mind something different from the true Anabaptist understanding (Bosch 1993:92, 94-54). Bosch seems to let the *alternative community* terminology remain with the Anabaptists, while he developed his own more ecumenical understanding of missiology and theology. His earlier Anabaptist influences remain important, and remain visible in his writings right through till the end, and he also points out Anabaptist influences within the broader ecumenical theology (see Bosch 1993:94). But it is kept in creative tension with a number of other approaches to church-world and church-state relationships.

Was there development in the ecclesiology of Bosch? Where Bosch initially described his approach as a combination between Anabaptist and Reformed ecclesiology, he develops a greater appreciation of liberation theology and political theology over time (see Bosch 1993; 2004:512-513; 1995: 56). His rejection of the Bonhoeffer phrase "church *for* others" for "church *with* others" is another development, one that is very important for the understanding of public theology, which would be developed, in the next chapter.

3.3   David Bosch and *Resident Aliens*

Although Storrar consider Bosch to be the most helpful articulation for a new generation public theologians, and Bosch find the work of Hauerwas and Willimon to be an important articulation for the mission of the church, Storrar (2007:8) Storrar (2007:8) sees something very different from public theology in the approach of Hauerwas and Willimon. Comparing the relation between church and world in Bosch, as articulated in the *alternative community*, with that of Hauerwas and Willimon will help us evaluate possible contradictions in Storrar's work, as well as provide a better understanding of the specific understanding of the *alternative community*, and with this also its later articulation as a *distinct community*, in Bosch.

3.3.1   Concerning politics

In the approach of Hauerwas and Willimon we find an attempt to provide an alternative to a church sold out to *Constantinianism*. They see *Constantinianism* as the belief that there is no other way to achieve justice than through politics, a believe permeating both liberal and conservative churches. Writing from an American perspective, they point out how both assume that their primary social task is to endorse American Democracy (Hauerwas & Willimon 1990:31-32).

Hauerwas & Willimon offers an alternative to both liberal and conservative Christianity (Hauerwas & Willimon 1990:32), and discuss "the false Niebuhrian dilemma of whether to be in or out of the world, politically responsible or introspectively responsible" (Hauerwas & Willimon 1990:43). The task of the church is not to create alternative political assertions that must then be translated into "terms which can be embraced by

any thinking, sensitive, modern (though disbelieving), average American" (Hauerwas & Willimon 1990:37). To the contrary, their view is "that the political task of Christians is to be the church rather than to transform the world" (Hauerwas & Willimon 1990:38). Viewed from this angle, the most effective thing that the church can do for the world is the "creation of a living, breathing, visible community of faith" (Hauerwas & Willimon 1990:47).

This approach has a lot in common with that of Bosch. He also talks about changing society by changing the church, but he seems to allow more room for Christian participation in society. He says that Christians may never withdraw themselves from the tasks of the world and public life. Social factors may never become a taboo in the church (Bosch 1979:224). He leaves room for Christians taking part in politics, but in his view a certain distance should exist between the Christian and his fellow politicians, since the Christian knows that in a certain sense political solutions are relative (Bosch 1981:33). Bosch also "discussed various other possibilities for peaceful reform through such tactics as negotiation, political action and civil disobedience" (Livingston 1990:13). Where, in the work of Hauerwas and Willimon, the *alternative community* functions as the only legitimate option for the church, for Bosch this depends on the context. There can be times when the *alternative community* approach would be the only possible option available to the church (see also Livingston 1990:13), but Bosch's own understanding, especially as articulated in *Transforming Mission*, rather finds the creative tension we explained above. The difference between Bosch and Hauerwas and Willimon might become clear when we look at the different ways they made use of the Anabaptist tradition.

3.3.2   The Anabaptist Tradition

Though none of them were Anabaptist in their church affiliation, Houerwas and Willimon, as well as Bosch, recognize their indebtedness to Anabaptist theology. Hauerwas and Willimon are both Methodists, whereas Bosch was a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. In both their approaches to the *alternative community* we can see the

influence of John Howard Yoder (Hauerwas & Willimon 1990:44-46; Nicol 1990:89; Ahonen 2003:64).

Hauerwas and Willimon give a short defence of early Anabaptism, saying that the early Anabaptists had no desire of withdrawing from the world. Their view is not sectarian, but is a way of providing an alternative which the world would otherwise not know (Hauerwas & Willimon 1990(1989):41-42). Bosch (1995:60) doesn't consider the work of Hauerwas and Willimon to be sectarian either. Drawing from the work of Yoder, Hauerwas and Willimon make a distinction between the activist, conversionist, and confessing church (Hauerwas & Willimon 1990:44-46).

- The *activist* church seeks to build a better society, rather than to reform the church. It sees God at work behind the movements for social change, and glorifies God through the humanization of social structures. Hauerwas and Willimon disagree with this approach. They believe that this view lacks the theological insight to judge history for itself, and that by using it, politics becomes a sort of religiously glorified liberalism.

- Opposite from this we find the *conversionist* church which withdraws from societal tinkering, and rather shifts its political action to the individual soul. This church argues that we should rather focus on personal guilt and personal experience of reconciliation with God and neighbour and does not offer alternative social ethic or structure to the existing one. Hauerwas and Willimon criticize this church for sacrificing the political claims of Jesus.

- The confessing church, which is Yoder's radical alternative, is not found on middle ground between the above two approaches. This church seeks to be faithful to God, rather than effective in society, but also knows that this is the most effective thing it can do for the world. It seeks to influence the world by being church, that which the world can never be.

Although he also differentiates between his own approach and those of the first two mentioned by Yoder, Bosch (1979:224) does not use the same labels. The ecclesiology

of Bosch differs from that of Hauerwas and Willimon. As mentioned above, Bosch finds his own approach, even at the time in which he explicitly uses the term *alternative community*, in a combination of the Anabaptist and the Reformed understanding of the relationship between church and world. This combination gave rise to a unique understanding of the alternative community, which, although acknowledging the distinctive nature of the church, still calls for active participation in society. Over time this only broadened into a wider range of possibilities within this relationship, but Bosch still holds on to Yoder's understanding that we are not called to be effective, but to be faithful. Contrary to Hauerwas and Willimon, Bosch (1995:60) acknowledges that our being faithful does not necessarily guarantee success.

3.3.3   In Conclusion: Public theology, *Resident Aliens* and Bosch

Hauerwas and Willimon directly critiques the idea that "the world sets the agenda for the church", and seek to provide an alternative to Martin Marty's idea of a public church, which would oblige Christians to go public with their social agenda, and to work within the given social structures to create a better society (Hauerwas & Willimon 1989:30-31). Martin Marty is credited by many as the originator of the concept *public theology* (Bezuidenhout 2007:7) while someone like Forrester (2004:6) speaks for public theology in general when he says that "public theology often takes 'the world's agenda', or parts of it, as its own agenda". Coming from Forrester's school, Storrar's critique of *Resident Aliens* can easily be understood.

With this said, it is important to note that Storrar, when reading Bosch from the perspective of public theology does not sufficiently take into account the distinctive and countercultural nature of the church and its relation to the world in Bosch's ecclesiology. Storrar's focus on *Transforming Mission* might be responsible for this, since signs of the influence of Anabaptism on Bosch easily gets lost within the vast encyclopaedic range of this work.

It becomes clear that a certain tension exists between Bosch and public theology. I will discuss this in the following chapter, but the importance of Bosch for public theology will

also be considered. In drawing on Bosch for the study of public theology Storrar have made a very important contribution.

Chapter 4

4. The public theology of David Bosch

4.1   Introduction

Throughout this study Smit's conclusion (2008), that our ecclesiology will to a large degree determine our public theology, has been importanct. Now that we have at least painted a general picture of Bosch's ecclesiology, we need to consider his understanding of what it is that the church should be doing in the world. For Bosch this was what he called *mission*. A short comparison between Bosch and the field of public theology also needs to be made, after which we can attempt to sketch a picture of what the public role of theology plays in the Bosch's understanding.

4.2   The scope of mission and the scope of public theology

This heading refers to two articles. The one was written by Bosch in 1984, titled *The scope of Mission*[4], the other by Forrester in 2004, titled *The scope of Public Theology*. What follows is not simply a comparison between the two. I will also look at other writings of Bosch, as well as other writings from the field of public theology.

4.2.1   The scope of mission for Bosch

Bosch's important publication, *Witness to the World* (1980), is structured around the tension between the "evangelical" and "ecumenical" models of mission. He concluded that the evangelical approach might lead to a narrowing of the scope of the gospel, while the ecumenical approach may lead to a watering down of the gospel (Conradie 2005:558). Similarly, the article which bears the same title as this section reacts against two reductionist positions concerning the church's mission: the one interpreting it in narrow evangelistic categories, the other in liberationist categories (Bosch 1984:18).

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[4] This was the publication of a 1982 sermon at the Church Missionary Society

In this article Bosch expounds his exegesis of *The Gospel According to Matthew*, especially chapter 28:18-20, to counter the interpretation which says that this text talks about leading non-Christians to a first commitment to Christ (make disciples), which only then must be followed by a stage of "perfecting" (teaching them to observe) (Bosch 1984:19). As Bosch explains, the *teaching* is not something which follows *making disciples*, but qualifies the main verb "make disciples" (Bosch 1984:24). Bosch summarizes the content of the *teaching* in two words: justice and love (Bosch 1984:26). "In summary then: Jesus has commanded the fulfilling of the Law which is the practice of justice-love. To love the other person means to have compassion for him or her to see that justice is done. Love of neighbour and enemy manifests itself in justice" (Bosch 1984:27). He endorses the words of Waldron Scott who wrote: "One must understand discipleship in order to make disciples, and discipleship is not fully biblical apart from a commitment to social justice…. To be a disciple is to be committed to the King and his Kingdom of just relationships" (Scott in Bosch 1984:28). Of the narrow evangelistic interpretation against which Bosch is writing in this article he says: "They falsely teach that if individuals have a personal experience of Christ in traditional pietistic terms they will automatically become involved in the changing of society" (Bosch 1984:29).

Although this article reacts mainly against what Bosch calls a narrow evangelistic understanding of the gospel, two things need to be noted from the broader body of Bosch's writings to put this into perspective. The first is that Bosch always remained clear on the fact that mission also includes evangelism. His polemic was not against evangelism as such, but against those that made evangelism the primary or even exclusive task of the church, with social responsibility being secondary or optional. He has made similar arguments against those who see mission exclusively as social justice (Bosch 1980:212-220). However, more than merely the relation between evangelism and social justice was of concern in the writings of Bosch. In the concluding chapter of *Transforming Mission* Bosch acknowledges that in attempting to find a more radical and comprehensive hermeneutic of mission,…

> "…we may perhaps move closer to viewing everything as mission, but this
> is a risk we will have to take. Mission is a multifaceted ministry, in respect

of witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualization, and much more. And yet, even the attempt to list some dimensions of mission is fraught with danger, because it again suggests that we can define what is infinite".

(Bosch 2004:512)

This will be put into perspective when we note the second point, which is that Bosch never intended to provide a blueprint for what mission is. He makes it clear that missiology cannot get access to biblical "laws" of mission, which determine how mission has to be performed or what mission should be (Bosch 2004:497). Rather, a dynamic tension should exist between text and context; missiology should "link the always-relevant Jesus event of twenty centuries ago to the future of the promised reign of God for the sake of meaningful initiatives in the present" (Van Engelen in Bosch 2004:498). And it is exactly this which one finds in Bosch's talk on the scope of mission. Speaking at the 1982 Church Missionary Society he said: "Today we stand on the threshold of yet another paradigm shift, which is as yet, difficult to delineate… An era has passed, but the contours of the new are still faint and indistinct" (Bosch 1984:30).

The challenge mission needs to address, that which should fall within the scope of mission within this new paradigm, he summarizes as:

"The optimism – indeed euphoria – of the 1950s and 1960s has gone beyond recall. The horizon has darkened progressively throughout the world in the past decade. The world has shrunk to a global village faced with a total system of death, in which twelve million refugees – one third of them in Africa, most of whom are woman and children – live in the shadow of death, in which seventeen million children die of starvation each year (a figure which may reach thirty-five million a year by the end of the decade), in which racism and brutal repression – from the left and from the right – appear to be endemic, in which militarism is on the

increase and more than half a million pounds are spent *each minute* on military budgets. The situation is truly apocalyptic and utterly terrifying.".

<div align="right">(Bosch 1984:30)</div>

And 10 years later, at a conference in France, Bosch (1995:55-57) again addresses the changing context of Western society, as he calls for questions of ecology and hedonism in Western society to be on the agenda of mission. According to Bosch, we should anticipate an ever-changing scope of mission, both in our missiology, our quest in search of what mission is, as well as regarding the questions that should be addressed.

4.2.2   The scope of public theology

On the task of public theology we concluded in chapter 1:

> "We can say that the task of public theology would be to make a distinctly Christian contribution to the building of a just society. Public theology takes part in public discourse in a way that is distinctly Christian, but uses language that is accessible within this discourse. It seeks to help in the building of a decent society by offering distinctive and constructive insights from its treasury of faith."

<div align="right">(:21)</div>

On what public theology is *not*, Forrester writes: Public theology is

> "…theology which is not primarily concerned with individual subjectivity, or with the internal discourse of the Church about doctrine and its clarification, important as these things are. Public theology, as I understand it, is not primarily and directly evangelical theology which addresses the Gospel to the world in the hope of repentance and conversion".

<div align="right">(Forrester 2004:6)</div>

In giving an outline of the development of the scope of ecumenical public theology, Forrester clearly points out how the questions which public theology had to address, as well as the method with which it was being addressed, has changed over time. This included the Confessing Church and the German Church Struggle with Bonhoeffer and Barth as important figures (Forrester 2004:8-9) and the ecumenical social ethics and the middle axiom approach that emphasised that the insights of those with inside knowledge needs to be combined with those of theologians, which included people like Oldham and Preston (Forrester 2004:10-11). In the 1960s and 1970s, as the ecumenical movement changed and the white male academic dominance faded, strong voices against the middle-axiom approach emerged. They accused Oldham and others of being overly positive about the objectivity of the social sciences and its ability to produce solutions that are value-free (Forrester 2004:12-13).

Let us pick up the trail in more detail from this point onwards, since this concerns the time in which Bosch was also active, and since the development of ecumenical public theology from this point onwards directly gave rise to the public theology being discussed today. It was the influence of Marxism and especially liberation theology that became increasingly dominant in ecumenical social thinking from the 1960s onwards. "This new public theology was unabashedly utopian" (Forrester 2004:14).

In South Africa this found life in theologies located within the Church struggle against Apartheid. In the late 1960's it found form as a Confessing theology, with the publication of *Message to the People of South Africa*. The influences of the German Confessing Church, of Bonhoeffer and Barth, were evident. But Black theologians identified more with James Cone and Gustavo Gutiérrez, and in the early 1970s political theology in South Africa started to take on the form of liberation theologies rather than white liberal or confessing theologies. According to De Gruchy a non-racial form of theology started to operate during the 1980s, which gave rise to the *Kairos Document*, which not only attacked *state theology* but also that which was called *church theology*, understood as an approach to try and find a middle *third way* (De Gruchy 2004:49-51).

The South African situation also gave rise to public theology on an international level, in what Forrester (2004:15) calls "perhaps one of the greatest successes of the new ecumenical social ethics": the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR). The PCR took sides against Apartheid and said that those supporting it were in a state of heresy. It was a time in which the WCC learned that ecumenical social ethics goes beyond making pronouncements, but that "…the Church must show in action and in the way it structures its own life the validity of the courses it commends to governments and to the nation" (Forrester 2004:16).

In looking back, we notice that the scope of public theology over the past century has been ever changing, pertaining to both what public theology is, and the issues it addresses. Political theology and liberation theology might not be considered public theology within the definitions used by some today (Storrar 2008, De Gruchy 2004:47), but it still provides the background against which contemporary public theology has evolved.

Today the context for public theology is formed by the growing concern for inter-religious dialogue. Internationally this becomes important after the events of 11 September 2001, of which Forrester says:

> "The events of September 11 2001 transformed everything in a moment. The pressing issue is now no longer how to present the claims of contemporary Christian theology to a hearing in the secular public arenas of the North Atlantic countries, or how to gain and sustain constructive Christian theological presence in the Western public sphere. It is now the urgent life-and-death question of how to understand, discipline, channel and criticise the powerful forces of religion which today dominate the global political scene, for better and for worse".

(Forrester 2004:16)

For Storrar (2008) the world of religions and inter-faith relations becomes a fourth public (alongside the three publics in the approach of Tracy). Within post-1994 South Africa

inter-faith relations have not been brought to the table by crisis, but through the multi-faith character of the new democracy. Under the constitution, public discourse now becomes a multi-faith enterprise. This is profoundly different from the liberation struggle, in which churches had a very high profile (De Gruchy 2004:53-54).

4.2.3   David Bosch and public theology

Although Storrar considers *Transforming Mission* to be the best articulation of public theology, the above analysis points out sharp tensions between public theology and the missiology of Bosch. Written 20 years after Bosch talked about the changing scope of mission, Forrester finds the roots of ecumenical public theology exactly there where Bosch was constantly delivering critique against a watered-down gospel. Forrester (2004) traces the development of public theology through the ecumenical church, meaning that which developed primarily around the WCC. But when Bosch talks about an *Emerging Ecumenical Missionary Paradigm* in *Transforming Mission*, it cannot be reduced to that which happened surrounding the WCC. Bosch's emerging paradigm is developed by tracing the developments of both "ecumenical" and "evangelical" thought (a tension which he primarily addressed in *Witness to the World*), as well as the Roman Catholic Church. Where "ecumenical" for Forrester refers to a specific viewpoint in theological thought, we could say as a descriptive of a certain (although very large) type of theology specifically surrounding the WCC, for Bosch "ecumenical" functions in the broader understanding including the entire church; an explicitly critical attitude towards denominationalism (Bosch 1995:57).

Where public theology in the 1960s to 1980 was primarily liberation theology, Bosch frequently and consistently made it clear that mission must never be reduced to liberation. For Bosch liberation theology was but one element of mission. But the tension between Bosch and the public theology Forrester expounds was not only in the fact that mission for Bosch is wider than liberation theology, but also in that Bosch chose a distinctly different path than that of liberation theology in the struggle against Apartheid. We focused on the ecclesiology of Bosch in the previous chapter, so let me just add that the ecclesiology of Bosch favours a 'third way' approach, although his approach also differs

from other 'third way' theologies, such as that of Yoder. For this reason Nicol (1990:96) notes that Bosch should not be considered a third way theologian, since he was actively working against the regime, using methods which seemed best for him. It was for deeply theological reasons that Bosch didn't want to take sides in the way that the liberation struggle would have wanted him to (Nicol 1990:94).

Forrester (2004:14) describes the public theology that reigned from the 1960s as "unabashedly utopian". De Gruchy (2007:28), who played an important role in the South African struggle for liberation, describes public theology in the same way. It was exactly this utopianism, in which world history is salvation history, in which the activity of God is too easily read into historical events, which Bosch critiqued in the ecumenical movement (Bosch 1980:230-231; Livingston 1990:8).

If we want to agree with Storrar (2007:11) when he says that *Transforming Mission* is the most helpful articulation for public theology today, then it would imply an approach to public theology which is both broader than that which resulted out of liberation theology, but also distinctly different. Did Storrar understand Bosch correctly? At least to a certain extent, I believe he did. In retelling his own story of getting involved with public theology, Storrar (2007:11) notes that "…many of us in mid-life within the Global Network have come to our commitment to a global public theology through this disruptive and reparative experience of both evangelical and ecumenical conversion to the Gospel, the Church and the world." For those who come to public theology from both the evangelical and ecumenical conversations, the approach set out by Bosch would probably resonate with their own background more than the ecumenical public theology of the late 20th century that Forrester describes.

For this reason then, we must now attempt to answer the question of this study: "What would the public theology of David Bosch look like?"

4.3 Bosch as Public Theologian

If David Bosch then shapes our vision of public theology, what would it look like? Smit made us aware that our public theology would to a large extent be formed by our ecclesiology, which the differences between Bosch and many other proponents of public theology confirm. Bosch has written extensively about the importance of the relationship between our eschatology and missiology, and how eschatology determines our missiology (Bosch 1979:230-238; 2004:498-510). The importance of eschatology for public theology became evident in the discussion on the utopianism of the later developments of ecumenical public theology. Ever since his Doctoral studies under Cullmann, Bosch has shown a strong interest in eschatology. According to Livingston (1990:5) "one sees the influence of eschatology throughout his writings. It permeates his theologising, and determines his fundamental theological stance".

In the ensuing discussion of the public theology of Bosch, I expand the short discussion on eschatology in the theology of Bosch that started in the previous chapter. Without a better understanding of this we cannot understand Bosch as public theologian. Following this I will focus primarily on two chapters out of his writings. They are from the last chapters of his last two books, and in both we find something of Bosch's vision of the future of mission, seen from his early 1990s context.

4.3.1 Bosch's eschatology

Near the end of *Witness to the World* we find a chapter titled "Mission, History and Eschatology". These three concepts were inseparable in the theology of Bosch. In the first four chapters of *Transforming Mission*, Bosch attempts to trace the "fundamentally *historical* nature of biblical faith and eschatology" (Bosch 1991:499). "It belongs to the essence of the biblical faith, Old and New Testament, to perceive God primarily as a God acting in history … revelation is the word for God making himself known in *historical acts*" (Bosch 2004:499).

Bosch on the one hand rejects views which make eschatology a field that talks only about the future. This understanding undermines our task to build God's kingdom in this world,

since exclusively focusing on the parousia, would lead to evading responsibilities in the present (Bosch 2004:504-506). On the other hand Bosch also rejects views that work with an entirely 'this-worldly' understanding of mission. These approaches seem impatient with the slowness of the coming of God's reign, and seek to redefine the kingdom, rebuilding it using instant techniques. They conclude that the *missio Dei* has reached its goal where the liberation of true humanity has taken place (Bosch 2004:506-507).

In the understanding of Bosch, mission and eschatology needs to be in creative tension; that is creative tension between future and present. "…we are to claim this entire world for God, as part of God's reign. God's future reign impinges upon the present; in Christ, the future has been brought drastically closer to the present" (Bosch 2004:506). Yet at the same time "…it is this focus on the reign of God, both present and future, that may grant us some appropriate perspective on our mission in the world. Without this eschatological dimension our "gospel" becomes reduced to ethics" (Bosch 2004:507). Bosch believes we should always doubt that the eschatological vision could be fully realized in history, yet at the same time this vision of a coming kingdom must translate itself into a radical concern for the penultimate, rather than the ultimate. We believe that the "already" outweighs the "not-yet", since the new age has irreversibly begun and the future is guaranteed, but we should remain wary of too confident claims that we have the will and power to usher in this new world, too easily identifying God's will and power with ours (Bosch 2004:508-509). This *already* and *not-yet* eschatology are not in perfect balance in Bosch's understanding. Rather they exist together, in creative tension. For Bosch, mission focus on this day and age, this is the only time in which mission can function. We believe that the kingdom of God is coming to this world, but at the same time we are not too quick to identify its coming, and always remember that only God can bring the future.

Bosch would be critical of any public theology that identifies the coming of the kingdom with its own action, and would consider public theology that claims to introduce the kingdom through whatever action as unduly optimistic. Yet at the same time Bosch would say that it is exactly the sphere of the world, also the public sphere, where Christians should involve themselves in seeking the kingdom of God, since God's reign

over all of creation, not just the church, and not just heaven someday. His reign is already guaranteed.

4.3.2 Bosch's public theology and its possible contributions for the 21st century

Is it possible to talk about the public theology of Bosch? If public theologians are not understood as those who necessarily stand within a certain theological tradition, keeping to certain methodological rules (see De Gruchy 2007:28; 39-40), but as those who seek the welfare of the city, and do this especially through participation in the public discourse, and in helping in the building of a decent society, then we should answer: undoubtedly! In conclusion I present five elements which would form part of the public theology of Bosch.

1. It is the Reformed and ecumenical vision of Bosch that primarily inspired Storrar (2007:11). In these elements we find Bosch to be very much in league with contemporary public theology. His Reformed background caused Bosch to constantly emphasise that Christians should not opt out of civil society, should never live within a Christian ghetto. We find the possibility of a generally positive attitude towards what may be achieved in human and world history. Christians should be committed to justice and peace in the social realm, and should pay serious attention to ecological issues (Bosch 2004:515-516; 1995:55-56).

2. In his ecumenical theology Bosch is distinctively different from the ecumenical theology in which earlier political and liberation theologies were found. As already shown, Bosch's true ecumenical theology would also be evangelical (Bosch 1980:202-220), critical of any form of denominationalism (Bosch 1995:57-58). Although this places Bosch at odds with previous generations of public theologians, Storrar notes that those in mid-life now involved with the *Global Network for Public Theology* have "come to our commitment to public theology through this disruptive experience of both evangelical and ecumenical conversion to the Gospel" (Storrar 2007:11). Indeed, if Jones (2008:18-22) is correct in his analysis of an emerging generation of Christians who are moving beyond the liberal and conservative divide, and seeking a more complex reality,

then an approach such as that of Bosch, which attempted to overcome this in his emerging paradigm of mission, might resonate even more with approaches to towards public theology in the years to come.

3. Public theology has been very much indebted to Reinhold Niebuhr. Forrester (2004:10) agrees with the view of Hauerwas that the church plays a very small role in Niebuhr's theology. However, over time the church has become more important in public theology. Storrar (2007:12), in spite of his critique of Hauerwas and Willimon, agrees with them that public theology should be rooted in the common life and public witness of the local church. For Bosch (1995:59), witness in a post-Christian West will only be credible if it flows from a local, worshiping community.

4. Two last points needs to be made concerning Bosch's approach to public theology. Bosch was particularly suspicious of Western society, and urges that mission should be countercultural:

> "The point is that Western culture, perhaps due to Locke's philosophy, is inherently hedonistic, emphasizing the selfish dimension in human nature. Bacon said that the goal of science was "to ease man's estate"; Descartes said that science will make us "masters and possessors of nature." This mentality has injected into our culture an insatiable desire for self-gratification. People want to enjoy their football matches, rock festivals, television programs, holidays, and parties – all of which they "deserve" after a hard day's work. Sacrifice, asceticism, modesty, self-discipline, and the like, are not popular virtues. Much of this has entered into our churches as well, tangibly in the "prosperity gospel," more effectively camouflaged in mainline churches but present there as well. We all crave for acceptance by our culture and for a well-defined role within it. But then the gospel becomes inoffensive and inoperable, with Christianity just another societal element. I believe that we have to communicate an alternative culture to our contemporaries. Part of our mission will be to

challenge the hedonism around us, inculcating something of the spirit of being "resident aliens" in the world." (Bosch 1995:56-57).

Where some in public theology today choose to work within the boundaries set out by our democratic societies (Marshall 2004:12; De Gruchy 2004:54), others have noted that it might be necessary to critique this very system (De Gruchy 2004:59). Bosch provides us with a tradition within which the church, even as church *with* others, can still provide this critique. Bosch also serves as a constant reminder that the church would always be required to be this type of prophetic voice.

5. The last point which Bosch would stress is that public theology would have to be a ministry of the laity (Bosch 1995:59). Bosch says that this is the only way in which to divide private and public, since the laity clearly belongs to the public and secular world, while pastors belong to a separate "religious" world. His approach is closer to that of Van Aarde (2008) than as it was understood by those who followed Tracy.

Indeed, Bosch and public theology make for strange bedfellows, particularly because of the critical distance he maintained with liberation and political theologies during the church struggle. At the same time, Desmond Tutu has noted the difficulty of those who were involved in the church struggle, and who then came into a position of power rather than oppression, to find their distinctive role within a society (Storrar 2008). In drawing from a different tradition than public theology that developed out of the liberation and political theology of Apartheid South Africa, Bosch provides us with a way forward which address exactly this.

Within a changing postmodern era, the appreciation younger public theologians such as Storrar have for Bosch might pave the way into a new form of public theology that will learn from traditions it haven't learned from in the past. Which will be ecumenical in the true sense of the word.

4.4 Conclusion

Public theology, as with so many other concepts or schools, can never do justice to the theology of Bosch. Bosch's ecclesiology and eschatology call us to broaden our understanding of public theology. If Storrar is correct, and Bosch provides us with the best articulation of public theology within a postmodern paradigm, then future public theology would place a particular emphasis on the local community of believers and on the public role of the church.

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